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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZP](#) [IR](#) [AE](#) [PARM](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN AND UAE'S NEW ISLAND DISPUTE

REF: ABU DHABI 001903

CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian L. Burns, Acting Consul General, Dubai, UAE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) Summary: Iran lodged a complaint with the UN that the ongoing construction of man-made islands off the coast of the UAE could cause environmental damage to Iran. A Dubai-based environmental NGO believes rising temperatures and salinity levels from regional desalinization plants pose a greater risk to the health of the Gulf than these construction projects. While his views cannot be counted as a definitive environmental assessment, it seems clear Iran is using this accusation to try to chill UAE's frequent comments about the environmental hazards of an Iranian nuclear energy program. End summary

2.(U) On June 21, Mohammad Jaafar Sadat Mousavi, the head of Iran's Majles Environment Commission, lodged a formal complaint to the UN Secretary General regarding UAE construction of artificial islands in the Persian Gulf. The Iranian government expressed its concern about the environmental impact on Iran of the island projects along the UAE coastline. The planned construction of artificial islands spans the coastline from Dubai to Ras Al Khaimah, with possible future expansions.

3.(C) In a conversation that predated Iran's accusation, Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi, the Environment Department Director at Dubai-based NGO Emirates Diving Association, told PolEconOff that desalinization plants ringing the Gulf posed a significantly higher environmental threat to the Gulf than the islands under construction. The islands have negatively impacted the ecosystem along the UAE's northern coast, but he did not indicate this damage would spread beyond UAE's waters. Al-Zu'bi told PolEconoff two of the biggest and best known island projects in Dubai, the "Palm Jumeirah" and "The World" have destroyed fragile corals and choked surrounding waters with sediment. However, rising temperatures and salinity levels from desalinization have nearly wiped out these corals.

4.(SBU) Comment: In its letter, Iran warns that the completion of the island projects could undermine "peaceful coexistence" between Iran and UAE, while omitting specifics about the feared environmental damage. Al-Zubi's views do not substitute for a thorough environmental impact study, and we cannot say definitively that there is no substance to Iran's claim. Nonetheless, Iran's raising of the UAE island projects as an environmental concern may be a not-so-subtle hint to the UAE to tone down its increasingly frequent statements on Iran's nuclear program. The UAE, as well as some other GCC states, couch most

of its public statements of concern about Iran's nuclear program in environmental terms, focusing on fears of nuclear fallout from an industrial accident, rather than on more politicized issues like nuclear weapons. (reftel)

5.(U) The text of Mousavi's letter, published June 21 by ISNA, follows:

Dear Mr. Annan,

You are, no doubt, aware that the United Arab Emirates, our neighbors on the south side of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are pursuing the construction of numerous artificial islands, in the Persian Gulf, covering an area expanding 50 square kilometers.

The purpose of this letter is not to dwell on the financial aspects of this exercise, but rather to emphasize its serious and devastating consequences on environmental consideration. The fact that this project is being considered for implementation without any reference to neighboring states is not of importance at this juncture, but if this plan is to be implemented then it will be a blatant violation of the international convention 1958 and 1982 and enshrined general provisions. Any move towards the realization of this attempt, i.e. the construction of the islands, by UAE or any other regional state will not only jeopardize the environment but undoubtedly undermines the friendship and peaceful co-existence we all enjoy which we collectively endeavor to cultivate for the furtherance of the region. End Text.

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